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Environmental relationships

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ENVIRONMENTAL RELATIONSHIPS

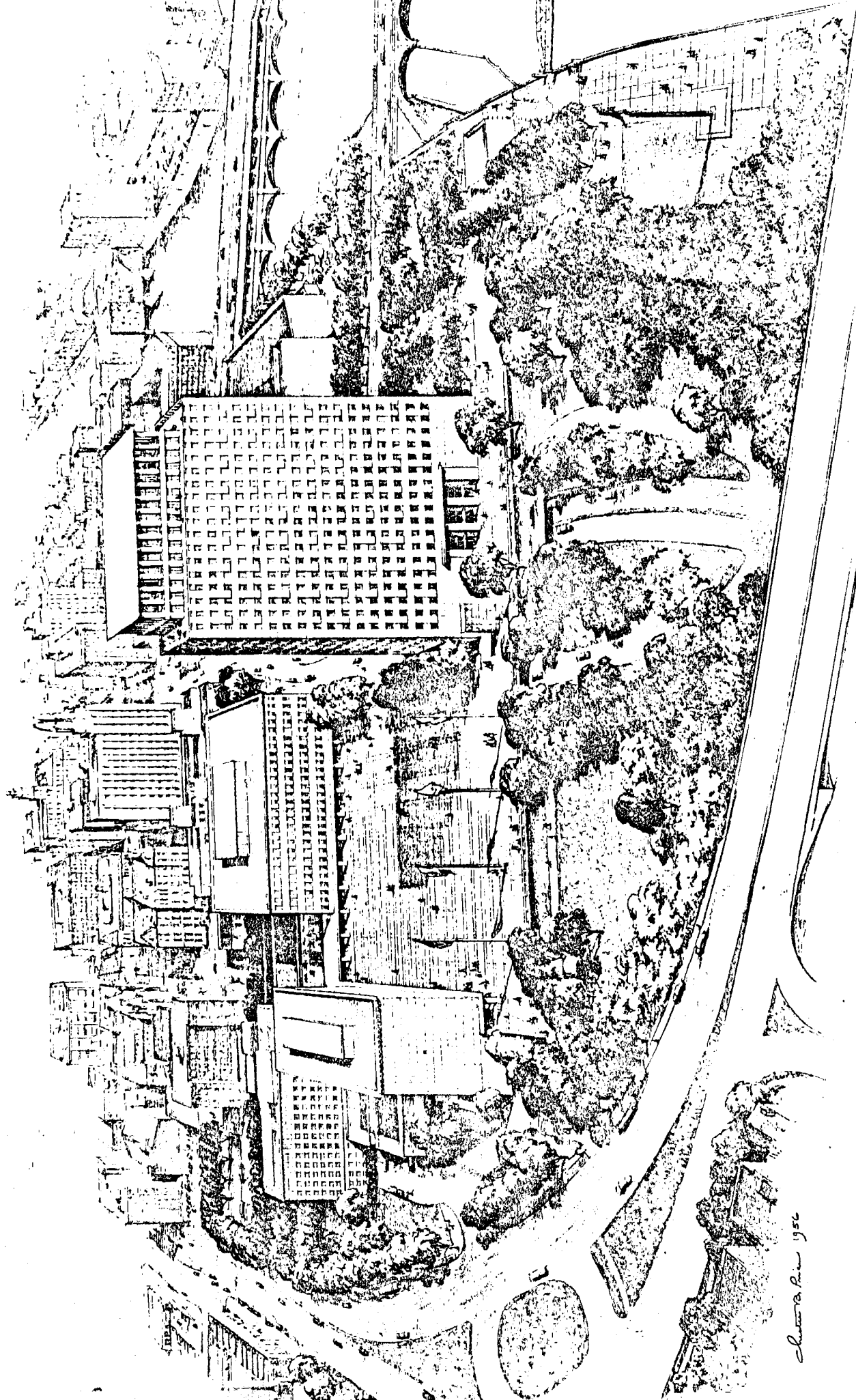
Thesis Project for the Master of Fine Arts Degree

School of Art and Design
College of Fine and Applied Arts
Rochester Institute of Technology

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Graphic Design and Communication
September 16. 1968

Advisory Committee Chairman:
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Choralew 1956

This is the architects' concept of the Rochester - Monroe County Civic Center

This book, written in conjunction with an audio-visual presentation, constitutes my thesis project for a Master of Fine Arts Degree. The purpose of this thesis has been: To investigate whether or not the Rochester-Monroe County Civic Center Complex relates to its immediate environment. I wished to find out if any relationships existed between the civic center complex and the adjacent areas.

The subject matter and choice of the project stemmed directly from work and ideas I developed as a graduate student. It was natural, therefore, that I should choose to make them my culminating endeavor.

It would be futile for me to give a detailed description of the audio-visual portion of this thesis project. Instead, this book is intended to be a supplement to the presentation; to be used to expand the theme, thoughts and questions that have arisen during the course of the project.

While an undergraduate, here, at the Institute, I had the opportunity to prepare a small-scale slide presentation. At that time, the audio-visual medium was new to most students and anything done in the medium was regarded as avant-garde. I thought, at the time, the audio-visual medium was the new frontier of graphic communications and for that reason I needed to pursue it further. Graduate school has afforded me that opportunity.

This past year has been a very intense one; the last several months of which, have been devoted almost entirely to the preparation of audio-visual material. I have been super-saturated with the medium and consequently, some of my ardor has been lost. Quite frankly, I shall be very happy to get back to the more conventional graphics for a while. Also,

I feel I have been upstaged by what is commonly called a "happening". These multi-media totalities, with their barrage of images make the conventional audio-visual seem dull.

Being an artist, I am very susceptible to new trends. This can sometimes get one into trouble-- it did me. I became so dissatisfied, part way along in the thesis, that I decided to make a change to another medium - motion pictures. I had no background or previous knowledge of movie-making, yet, I attempted to make a movie. It was, of course, a flop! One cannot afford experimentation of that type when a thesis project is due. I paid dearly for my foolishness but it was something I had to get out of my system, I suppose. Having overcome my movie-madness I was able to reorganize my thesis within its' original framework. To do so, required extending my project through the Summer Quarter.

I would like to take this opportunity, to express my appreciation for the constant and patient guidance of Professor Barschel. It was he, who saved me from the abyss; got me the needed extension and put me on the right track. Thank you, Sir.

Before being able to return to the audio-visual medium, I had to re-evaluate the basic purposes of the medium, in order to apply it properly. One has to realize that it is a medium, separate from, and not to be confused with, any other medium. As with every medium, the audio-visual presentation has very rigid boundaries which cannot be transgressed. For instance, audio-visuals will never be able to satiate the present demand for the multiple-image effect. It is impossible, from a purely mechanical stand-point. The medium has one feature though, which is often lacking in the others-- content. Because the images remain on the screen for a relatively long time, the content

of the image becomes very important. This eliminates those people who use the freedom of images to hide their inability to create anything more substantial.

I chose to make Rochester-Monroe County CivicCenter the subject of my environmental study, for very specific reasons. Since it was in the immediate Rochester area and as such, it was easily accessible. At the same time, to the degree that Rochester is similar to every other city, there are universal implications that can be drawn from it. Cities have the same basic problems and tend to resolve them in a like fashion. Several environmental audio-visual studies have already been done by R.I.T. students. This is reflective of the influence of Professor Barschel, a man, very aware of the environmental relationships and the problems they create. Nobody, until I took up the problem, had considered the Civic Center as a possible subject for investigation. Most students considered it to be such a monstrosity that it did not warrant a second thought. I felt that if this were the case, then it certainly should be investigated!

The following passages are from the study manuscript, compiled by the architects who designed the Civic Center complex. They represent the architects' conclusions to questions I sought to evaluate in my thesis--the character of the buildings, choice of site, building design and their analysis of area relationships:

The Architects initiated an analysis of area relationship studies. These studies led to a synthesis of the great volume of statistical and descriptive data into a program which stated, (a) how much space and what kind of space each of the departments of both organizations required for the immediate future, (b) an estimate of future requirements and (c) the inter-relation between departments and between them and the public. These factors of space and relationship defined the facilities which the buildings of the Civic Center provide.

BUILDING DESIGN

Having defined the problem, the Architects then studied various possible solutions. These studies included other factors which are not susceptible of such a systematic approach, but which have an equal if not greater import in design. These are problems of character of buildings, of amenities on the site, and the aesthetics of massing, architectural expression and construction techniques.

The design of each part of Civic Center is inter-related with every other part, requiring a co-ordination of the basic circulation patterns within and between buildings, about the site and around the neighborhood of the site, both of pedestrians and wheel traffic. These relationships must also fit with the arrangement of the elements of each building as an entity. Basic to the design of these buildings are the location of cores, (the assembly of stairs, elevator shafts, toilets, mechanical equipment spaces, and similar functions that service the building) in relation to the usable space, the shape and size of that usable space, and the mass or bulk of the building which these two elements comprise. It is also fundamental to the design of these buildings, that wherever occupancy permits, the usable spaces be designed with optimum flexibility for present and future use. The actual division of usable space is determined by present requirements, but the design of the space will make readily changeable, to suit other arrangements that the future may require. This flexibility is achieved by the development of a module, (the smallest unit of space, completely serviced with light, heat and ventilation). This unit is then repeated, and its multiples become the controlling dimensions of the building. The space then is dividable into any multiple of the module without reference to the usual interference of mechanical and electrical services.

CHARACTER OF BUILDINGS AND SITE

When the determinations of size of the various departmental functions to be housed in each building had been made, it became possible to develop the volume of each building required and by studying various schemes, to compose a great variety of possible ways to assemble them on the site. These were resolved by applying principles of simplification to the building masses to produce structures of satisfactory proportions within the framework of the requirements. When these volume studies were completed, the determination of architect-

ural expression of each building came under consideration. The module, practical factors of construction techniques, minimizing of maintenance costs and resulting character were all influential in the final determination of the appearance and materials chosen. The constant architectural values of the past have been applied in an attempt to achieve the dignity that is a requisite for buildings that must give aesthetic satisfaction over a long period of time.

The Civic Center buildings, then, will be steel framed structures, in general, sheathed in limestone. They will have metal pivoted windows and be trimmed with granites. Interior finishes will be metal wainscoting and partitioning, acoustical ceilings, resilient tile floors. Lobbies will have stone floors, marble wall finishes and acoustically treated ceilings. Special rooms, such as courtrooms, meeting rooms, and certain judicial spaces will be finished generally with wood panelling and carpets. Ceilings and walls will be designed with special attention to the control of sound. Toilet rooms will have glazed tile walls and ceramic tile floors.¹.

Change has always been the natural order of life, perhaps more so in the United States than in any other country. It has, for us, become a way of life. We have long held the opinion that no problem was too big for American ingenuity to overcome; and that nothing was invulnerable to the march of time. Unfortunately, this attitude has made people complacent. They have used the slogans to shield their eyes from the realities of the age. We have, in fact, become somnambulists-- sleep-walkers from another age. We use trite methods from the past to cope with problems of the present. Or, as dreamers, we sleep while a crisis envelopes us, hoping that by the time we awake, the problems will have disappeared or corrected themselves.

We are in the midst of a crisis, an environmental crisis, that threatens to consume the total social structure of this country and with it, most of the advanced nations of the World.

1. Architects- ~~Faragher and Macomber~~- Rochester, Voorhees, Walker, Smith, & Smith- New York; Civic Center, Rochester, N.Y. June, 1956.

Past acceptance of change does not help in this electronic age. We have grown accustomed to instantaneous response. We turn on a switch and, bingo, instant light, that is the way it is in this age-- everything is immediate. In such an age, one cannot hope to combat problems with thinking rooted in the past.

We persist in viewing problems as singular entities, each one to be dealt with separately. This perception is not only wrong, it warps our perspective, so we are no longer able to grasp the magnitude of the situation. One cannot apply arithmetic logic to problems which have multiplied geometrically in number and complexity.

Basic to the solution of the environmental problems of today, is the realization that problems have an ecology and, therefore, an inter-relationship. We call this inter-relationship of societal elements, environmental relationships. To overcome the crisis that confronts society, we must work within the framework of environmental relationships. We must combine and apply the talents of people throughout the whole spectrum of the social sciences and the arts: architects, industrial designers, graphic designers, sculptors, city planners, criminologists, conservationists, behavioral scientists, sociologists, psychologists, communications experts, traffic controls, industrialists and civic officials.

These people have specialized knowledge and training and have been attacking the environmental problems for many years. What has made them ineffectual, is that they have remained isolated; each one approaching the problems from his own specialized viewpoint.

What I envision is the creation of environmental design institutes in the various mega-metropolises, cities, and communities, each one working on a different scale to combat the prob-

lems at that particular level. This would give due emphasis to the micro, as well as, the macro problems. I think that the results of these efforts would be self-evident. The job of such groups would be, essentially, to act as a catalyst for social actions. They would dovetail public and private endeavors and provide conceptual harmony and unity to efforts which heretofore, have been piece-meal, headless and formless. We have operated like the man who jumped on his horse and rode off in every direction.

Throughout our past, cities, communities and structures have been put up and torn down without any rhyme or reason and with callous indifference to human life. We can no longer tolerate such actions. It is time for the trained professionals to take over from these headless horsemen, and their solutions must be diligently applied. Application is one of the greatest breakdowns to efforts of environmental designers. People regard their own opinions as equal to the knowledge of trained individuals. They must learn that as they accept the professional advise of a physician, so must they accept the advise of environmental designers because both are trying to alleviate a sickness.

Change by its very nature is a violent act, the question is just how violent will it be? We teeter on the brink of civil war. Time is running out on this system of things. The ghetto and the mountain of other problems will not allow themselves to be ignored any longer. If we do not act now and apply the abundant talent, knowledge and skill of the environmental designers we may all be swept away in the deluge.

The concern of this thesis is not in the wreckage already done to our cities but in what will happen in the future. There seems to be two trends developing in this country. One

trend was ushered in at the Montreal World's Fair - Expo '67. The second, is personified by the Rochester-Monroe County Civic Center.

Expo '67 was a real eye-opener for anyone concerned about environmental relationships. It contained a certain gaiety and warmth that is the soul of our human nature. Expo existed solely for the enjoyment of people. People were the center of everything done there. There is an esoteric clique who think that the general public have the mentality of fourteen year old morons. The designers of Expo '67, obviously felt otherwise because they unleashed a wealth of material on a level of sophistication that was unprecedented -- and people responded to it with unbound enthusiasm.

Expo '67 was a glimpse of what life could be like, if we so choose. It came as a cultural shock to most people. There, in one exhibition was the latest and greatest that life has to offer. All of this was contained within a framework of an environmental design which allowed for individual excellence yet, keeping a unity to the whole. There were fantastic innovations in the audio-visual field, graphic design, architecture, exhibit design, exhibition planning, movie-making, sculpture and the crafts. These are not unattainable achievements that are the exclusive possessions of elaborate fairs. We can have these things, right now, if we so wished. Every community in this country could be a carnival of sights and sounds.

Consider, if you will, the wealth there is in Monroe County and compare this with the wealth of any city-state of Renaissance Italy, or Greece and Rome in antiquity. I have heard it said, that the Chairman of Xerox Corporation controls more capital that the largest bankers of Europe - the Rothchilds. Banks, too, we have in abundance. They appear in every shop-

ping plaza. In fact, with all the proposed office-buildings, it would seem that banks are amongst the best customers the building industry has. Add to this, Kodak Company and the host of other manufacturing and agricultural industries, this area possesses, and the amount of wealth that is ours can readily be seen. Yet, for all this, we are culturally barren when compared with, say, Renaissance Florence. It is the same way in every community throughout the land. We are blind to the banal, accept the shoddy and consider hodge-podge and chaos to be tantamount to progress.

How can we, in all honesty, bemoan the crisis that has enveloped our lives?

We do not lack the talent or creative knowledge to beautify our lives. Instead, what we lack is the desire to apply this creativity. All too often, the talents that we possess are mis-used, mutilated or simply ignored.

What the man of antiquity understood, and what we fail to see, is that if beauty and enjoyment is to pervade our lives; if anything of lasting worth is to be achieved, money has to be spent. Creativity in all its forms has been found to gyrate to wealth. The ancient Roman took it as his duty to beautify his city. He considered the monuments he built as enduring accolades to himself. For him, there was no divorcing public and private accomplishments.

What is the value of money, if not to deepen and enrich our lives? What is the worth of living, if the world is drab and univiting? To combat this, we must earnestly attempt to provide ourselves with an integrated environmental, cultural and design concept-- not as a matter of national policy but, rather, as a matter of national pride.

I have talked about total design concept, integrated environmental design. I have talked of utilizing our combined creative talents to redesign our cities. These designs must be such that they do not invoke homogeneity -- sameness. This, I believe is a trap which many of the great architects and city planners fall into, the result being a style of stamp that is deadly. Instead, these men should work with those wishing to build, so that each building relates to its neighbor; until eventually they form a developed nucleus. The Midtown Plaza and Xerox Plaza area has this quality. An even better example is the Baltimore Civic Center.².

Baltimore, Maryland, is developing a civic center with a pedestrian mall forming its nucleus, around which, public and privately owned, tall office structures are being built. This novel concept of jointly developing a civic center, completely breaks down the old idea that separates public and privately owned structures into specific areas, divorced from each other.

Throughout history, great architects have laid plans for the ultimate, planned city. Where these plans have been tried out, they have proven a complete failure. Time passes and ideas and needs change. L'enfant's Washington, for example, was being chopped and changed as soon as it left the drawing board.

The ultimate failure of the ultimate plan, has been Brasilia, Brasil. Designed by disciples of LeCorbusier, Brasilia stands as an architectural triumph but as a failure in human considerations. It was designed as the governmental capital of the country. As such, it was formed around the various governmental functions and needs. No thought was given to the private

2 Architectural Record Feb. 1966.

desires of the people who would occupy the buildings. Consequently the occupants, who are perhaps the most sophisticated and monied people in that country, found the city uninteresting. The pieces of art and sculpture scattered throughout public buildings, do not constitute a cultural base. So, the government and embassy workers sought their pleasures amid the sand and surf of Rio de Janeiro and the night life of San Paulo. Apparently come Friday afternoon, Brasilia is the site of a massive weekend exodus. If this is not bad enough, the second breakdown in the plan was the labor gangs, imported for the construction-- they stayed there after the construction ended. This has created a vast shanty town on the edge of the city.

To design a complete city is a problem too complex and intricate for even the greatest amongst us. Many of our present problems stem directly from plans for the functions people perform instead of planning for people themselves. Also, it is always homogenized to the point of super-saturation.

Rochester has become the victim of another type of planned foolishness-- the random parceling out of land for reconstruction. In both instances, people as people are lost in the shuffle.

No thought is given to the people in the areas marked for reconstruction, or as it is called, renewal. Where these people will live after their homes are destroyed is never considered, nor for that matter is whether or not they wish to be uprooted; nor is their communal spirit; nor whether or not their homes have any worth or character which might make them salvable. Once a home has been submitted to the bulldozer, that home is lost forever. This is pathetically true of an area included in my thesis project-- the city's third ward.

The third ward is an area of Nineteenth Century homes, none of which would stand as a great piece of architecture-- but together, they form a panorama of Nineteenth Century American Gingerbread which is irreplaceable. But, through the passage of time and social changes, it has deteriorated. Hence, the powers that are have marked it for extinction.

In the course of my thesis, I spent hour after hour at the Civic Center, going in, out and around it. I went there both in the daytime and at night, trying to discern what relationships existed because of, and with this center. I had, as I have stated, originally viewed the center in terms of choice of site, the character of the buildings, structure design and, its inter-action with the surrounding neighborhoods. So as I walked, sat, looked; I was always conscious of these questions as I viewed the buildings. I would ask people passing for their opinions about the structure. In fact, many times, people seeing me photographing the place would come up to me and express their opinion about the subject matter, without my asking.

Later, as my thesis developed, something changed. By some kind of osmosis, I began to see the Civic Center in a new and frightening light. I saw cities at war with themselves and our judiciary and law enforcement retreating behind cement walls. I saw a nation taking on a totalitarian nature; a nature that finds solace in sameness, in a washed out conformity in which our inner and outer selves become shades of grey. I saw expressways, throughways and by-ways that are only extensions of this sameness. All these things were not just seen by the eye, they were felt within me, as the artist sees and feels.

The Rochester-Monroe County Civic Center is the opposite of everything that Expo '67 stood for. I must be honest and admit that my opinion of the place was negative from the start.

But, this new realization put a new light on the subject. I was no longer contending with a singularly bad piece of architecture, but with a new attitude that is developing in the country, of which the Civic Center is only a symptom. With the situation both at home and with America's policies abroad, attitudes are changing. Hatred, intolerance and militarism have seeped back into our lives, and this is being reflected by our architecture.

The hope Expo '67 symbolized seems to have died in Chicago under police nightsticks and on the convention floor of the 1968 Democratic Party convention.

As part of my thesis research, I traveled to Toronto to see the Toronto Civic Center. At the time, I was interested in it from an architectural stand-point. This was during my movie-making period. I envisioned running two movie projectors, simultaneously, juxtaposing the Rochester Civic Center with that of Toronto.

When I finally dropped the motion picture medium, I also decided to eliminate the Toronto section from my thesis proposal. Nevertheless, in my subsequent wanderings around our Civic Center, my thoughts would drift back to Toronto. My thoughts were not just of an architectural structure, but of an environment that had been created. I remembered fountains, sculpture and a restaurant in which to dine and relax. And, I remembered people-people everywhere, standing, sitting, strolling. And cameras, the place seemed alive with people taking photographs. Above, on the top floor of the main building, was an observation gallery, from which one could view the whole city. The people of Toronto were proud to have one go and inspect their city. And what more natural observation point could there be but from the top of their Civic Center.



VIEWS OF THE TORONTO CIVIC CENTER





I became aware that what I had seen at Toronto, was an architectural structure that desired the presence and attention of people and people responded to this. It was in essence, a second Expo. It contained a certain human element, it catered to the desires of the public-- it is a public building.

Then, I would open my eyes and look again at our own Civic Center, trying to find some of the same warmth in it. I found none. Its very mass seems to weigh you down, as if it is preparing to reach out and crush you under one of its huge columns. It is ugly and depressing. No one lingers there. The only ones seen entering the buildings are the unfortunates who have some official business there-- maybe a parking ticket that has to be paid. What ever their business, their facial expression mirrors the brooding buildings they are about to enter. The great open plaza of the complex is often empty. The occasional person who can be seen there, is only using the place as a short-cut between Exchange Street and Plymouth Avenue. Even the office worker and police officers who work in the buildings do not wander around it on their break times. They enter it from an underground garage and leave by the same way. Nobody stays around.

If there is an answer to why this complex is so alien, it is contained within the architects' original study manuscript. The public, the people who have invested \$32 million³ in the complex, so far, were mentioned only once in the report: (c) the interrelation between departments and between them and the public. Does this represent an interest in people? As for aesthetic. to use the architects' own expression, the aesthetics of massing-- please consider that expression, I think it sums

3. Rochester Times Union, July 5, 1968, p. B1.

up their attitude towards aesthetics. They claim to have given consideration to the constant architectural values of the past, to produce a building that will give "aesthetic satisfaction over a long period of time". Yet, the only reference to this pleasing design, is in regards to toilets, stairways and functions that service the buildings. Toilet designers and those who consider function without considering people per se, provided us with the Rochester-Monroe County Civic Center.

The following is the narration to my audio-visual presentation: These grey, grotesque buildings are intended to be a civic center--the heart of a community. But there is no throbbing heartbeat, no pulse. --They are silent and foreboding-- a modern monolithic tomb. They are typical of the architecture produced when public apathy and a mindless bureaucracy combine to replace the professional city planners.

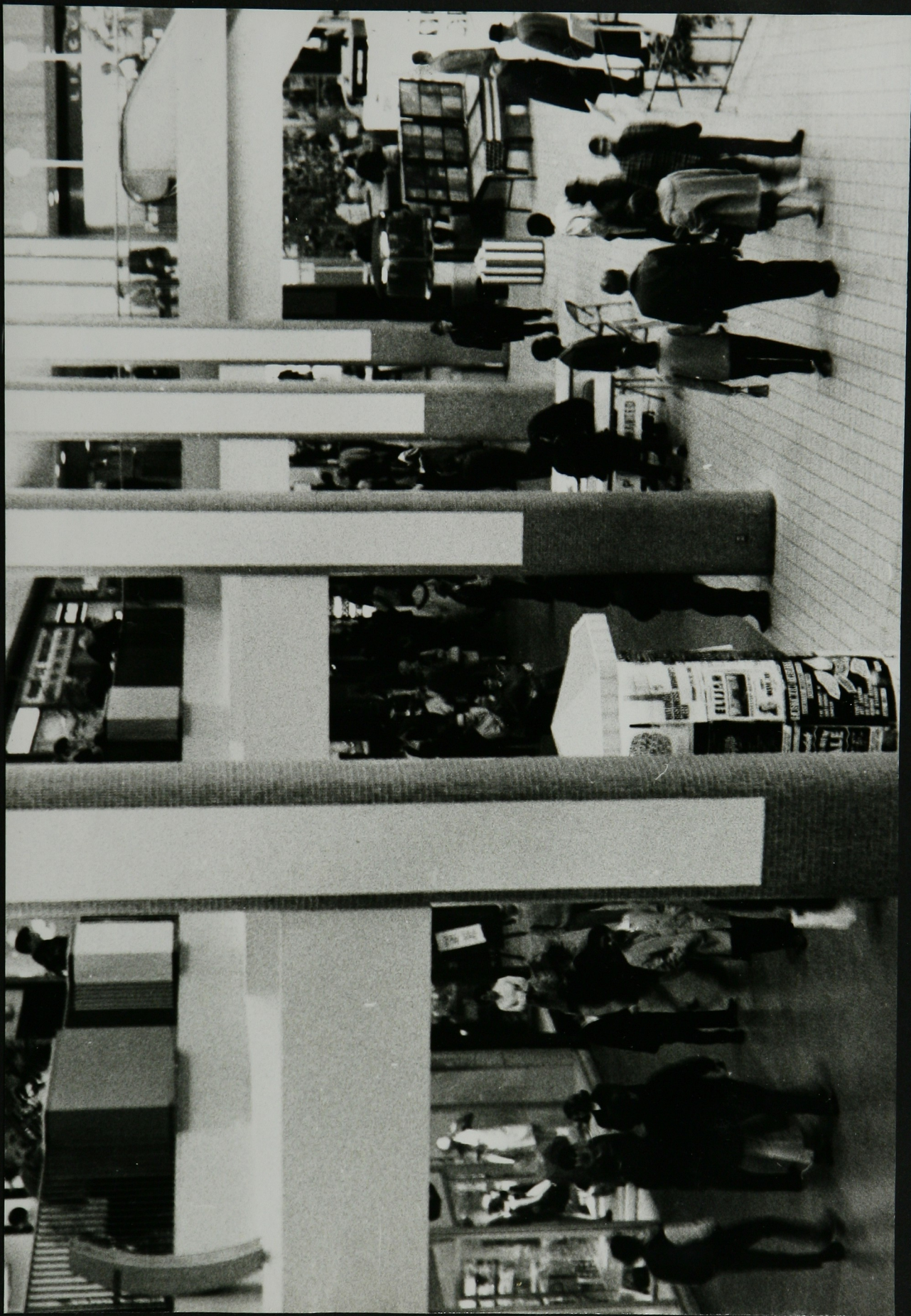
This architecture is the hallmark of totalitarian states. It appeared in Nazis Germany and again in Soviet Russia. Now it is here.

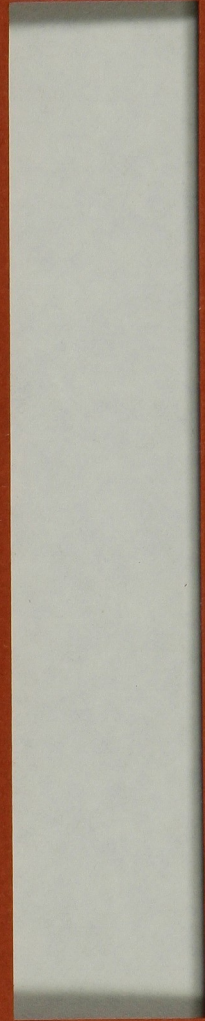
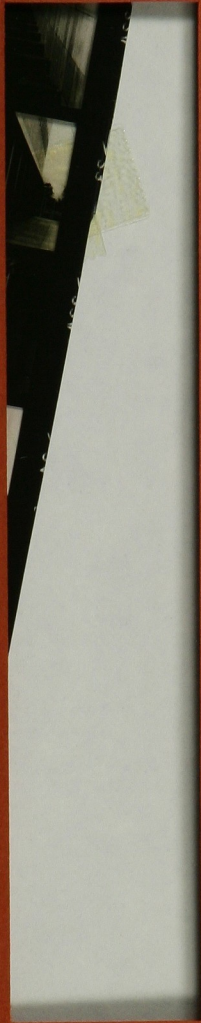
It is alien, characterless, impersonal and stands in stark contrast to the sights and sounds of the city around it. The Civic Center has happened. Let its existence stand as a warning that unless the people become concerned about the quality of architecture built in its name, the sombre building will be repeated and repeated until the fountains, the glimmering pools, the shade trees and the pieces of sculpture, the music the color and finally the gaiety is drained from our public life. 1984 can exist.

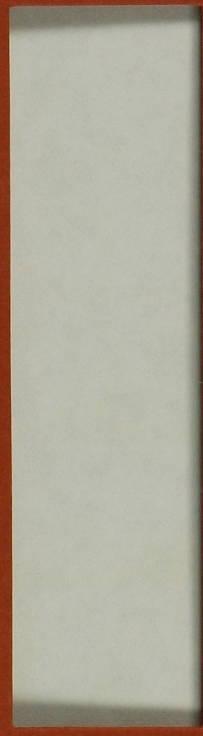
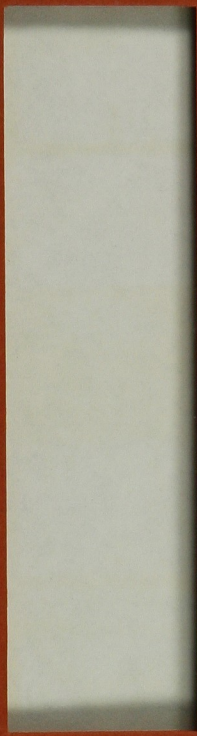
I am not prepared to remain a foreigner to my environment for long. Environmental design has to be inaugurated.

Following is a view of the plaza of the Civic Center and as a counterpoint, the interior of Midtown plaza. It expresses in a way words cannot, the central issue of my thesis.









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